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LITERARY SCOUTING IN PARIS

BY THEODORE STANTON

FOR the past quarter of a century I have been acting, among other literary occupations, as a sort of European Editor *in partibus* of this periodical, and in this way have often been brought into interesting relations with many men and women prominent in the political, literary, and artistic circles of the Old World. It is my purpose in this article to jot down a few of the impressions produced on me by these persons before my recollections become too dim to recall.

Of the little group of women writers whom my work brought me into contact with, one of the most brilliant, as she certainly was one of the most genial, was unquestionably the late Mme. Blanc, known in letters as Th. Bentzon. American authors are greatly indebted to this indefatigable and sympathetic Frenchwoman who, during a long period of years, introduced our best writers to the European world through the widely-read and influential pages of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. In her cozy little *entresol* looking out on the Place Victor Hugo, she always enjoyed chatting with an American concerning things American and especially concerning American literary matters. Perhaps my most curious souvenir of those *tête-à-têtes* is that which has to do with Mark Twain and his "Notorious Frog of Calaveras County." In 1872 Mme. Blanc published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* a biographical and critical sketch of the American humorist, when probably many Europeans heard of him and his fun for the first time. As an example of his manner, Mme. Blanc translated in full this frog story. Readers of Mark Twain's volume of *Sketches* will remember that he there gives his original text, Mme. Blanc's version, and then a funny retranslation from the French into English, or, as he puts it, "In English, then in French, then clawed back into civilized language once more by patient, unremunerated toil." Incredible as it may seem, Mme.

Blanc was greatly offended at this banter at her expense and complained to me almost bitterly at "the ungenerous way I have been treated by a fellow writer to whom I had been most kind." My explanation of this apparent obtuseness, so rare in the French and so surprising in a woman of Mme. Blanc's natural perspicacity, is that in his brief introduction to this chapter of his book, Mark Twain shows that he did not know the identity of Mme. Blanc and was not aware even that she was a woman.

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My experiences with some of the European authors in persuading them to try a stenographer in the production of their articles were varied and I must say that I found them as a rule very recalcitrant to any innovation of this sort, for some of them were still clinging faithfully to the quill pen.

My first notable affair of this kind was with Emile Zola, when he wrote for the REVIEW his admirable article, "War," an article which could be read with advantage even today, though it was written more than nineteen years ago. While it is quite true that there was much that was mechanical in Zola's method of composition, he was unquestionably a stylist, or rather was never weary of amending and striving to improve his text. I had a good example of this at the burial of Alphonse Daudet, where Zola was the principal speaker. I stood directly behind him when he read his oration and I noticed that his manuscript was black with erasures and additions. While we were at Père Lachaise cemetery, the afternoon *Temps* was engaged in setting up an advance copy of Zola's speech, and a few hours later I read the printed version, and, at a glance, was struck by the many differences between it and the one that I had seen and heard at the cemetery. A day or two later Zola told me that, after giving the *Temps* reporter, on the morning of the funeral, what he thought would be his speech, he went carefully over the manuscript again and in fact kept at work at it until the moment came to go to Daudet's house in the Rue de l'Université, where the procession started on its long march across the chilly city. So, after this experience, I really had no ground to be surprised at what happened some years later when I persuaded Zola to dictate to a stenographer his NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW article.

One morning in the winter of 1900-1 I arrived at Zola's

house in the Rue de Bruxelles, accompanied by one of the best stenographers of Paris. Zola soon appeared in the billiard-room where "the experiment," as he called it, was to be made. He held in his hand a half dozen small sheets of paper on which he had jotted down a certain number of notes. I introduced the two men and then left them alone, lest my presence should be a source of interruption of some kind. Two days later I received from the stenographer a copy of the dictation and nearly a week thereafter came from Zola the copy which had been sent to him. Though I had previously called his attention to the fact that, as the manuscript was to be translated into English and would not appear in the original French, he need not worry over little matters of style or shades of meaning, he had labored over the paragraphs as if they were to be placed at the head of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. In fact the sheets were in such a state that I had to send them all to the typewriter for a clean copy before putting the article in the hands of the translator. The following month I met Zola on the Boulevards, when his first words were, "Never will I try that system again; pen, ink and paper in my own hands will be my only tools."

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But this view was not shared by another able and voluminous French writer of a very different stamp in every respect from the Father of Naturalism. I refer to Emile Ollivier. In the closing years of his busy life, his intellectual wife, who is also the author of several volumes of her own, acted as his amanuensis, and though he did not abandon the pen himself, she wrote at his dictation, and rewrote practically all of the hundreds of pages which form his real *magnum opus*, the seventeen volumes of *L'Empire Liberal*. So when I proposed a stenographer, Emile Ollivier rather welcomed the idea and evidently enjoyed the experiment. I sent him the same stenographer whom I had sent to Zola; but how different the results! When the typewritten manuscript reached me, after having passed under the eyes of its author, it did not contain more than a half dozen changes and two or three of these were either misspelt names, a wrong date or an incorrect accent, faults all of which were to be attributed, probably, to the typewriter. And the next time I saw M. Ollivier, he remarked: "I only wish my wife understood stenography and could use the typewriter."

And the next time I saw the stenographer, he remarked: "I only wish all my clients were like M. Ollivier. He dictated as though he were delivering an oration in public. There was not a break or hesitation. My pencil moved on without a stop to the very end. There were no corrections or additions. All of which was very different from my experience with M. Zola, who dictated as if he had a big book before him, through whose pages he was searching for passages here and there which he could read out to me. Then there were modifications here and new matter inserted there, and all this without end or plan, it seemed to me, the half distracted stenographer. I never knew exactly where I was during the dictation."

A year or two later, when Emile Ollivier was called upon to make the reception speech to a new member of the French Academy, some surprise was occasioned and some criticism was indulged in because, contrary to Academic custom, he did not read his oration but delivered it with no manuscript before him and even without notes in his hand. And then I recalled how he spoke what was to have been a NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW article, but which, through a clerical error, was sent to another periodical where it duly appeared; and so I did not share the surprise of the academicians and the public which attends these ceremonies "under the cupola."

The fine article by Rodin, which the REVIEW published, "The Gothic in the Cathedrals and Churches of France," was prepared in a manner that combined the system tried with Zola and Ollivier and the ordinary method of holding one's pen oneself. It was of course too much to expect so busy a man as this sculptor to sit down at his desk with quill and paper and write such an article. He had not had experience in composition of this sort and the task would not only have been laborious but probably unsatisfactory. Then again, Rodin did himself justice only when he was "drawn out." His head was full of ideas, many of them grand ideas, but the ideas were apt to stay in his head unless somebody or something forced them to come forth. So that article was the product of conversations with the celebrated artist held in his picturesque home on the heights of Meudon and in the big workshop in the Rue de l'Université on the banks of the Seine, at Paris. Nor

did the article undergo translation in the ordinary sense. It was written by the "direct method," so to speak, by Professor Frederick Lawton, whose knowledge of French nearly equals his very fine mastery of English, and whose acquaintance with the personality and mentality of Rodin—Mr. Lawton has written the sculptor's biography—is almost as thorough as his grasp of the two tongues just mentioned. So what Rodin said in French was immediately, *séance tenante*, put down on paper in English. If there was any doubt about word or thought, it was then and there cleared up. If a statement seemed rich if developed, Rodin was questioned, suggestions were made, and a brief phrase often became a long and striking paragraph. And when the whole article was done, it was carefully translated to the listening artist who then made any additions, corrections or explanations deemed necessary. The result was that this article is not only a remarkable exposition of the Gothic, but a curious specimen of a translation which is not a translation.

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Jean Jaurès, the celebrated French socialist leader, who, it will be remembered, was assassinated on the very eve of the World War, dictated very well, too, though he preferred to sit down with a pile of fool's-cap before him and throw off an article in his big firm handwriting at one sitting. On this subject his former private secretary, M. Lucien Bilange, wrote me as follows from the trenches of Flanders:

When fatigued, after a long sitting of the Chamber where he had spoken or when he had just returned home from a lecture tour, Jaurès preferred to dictate to me, which he did very rapidly. Then a remarkable quality of his mind came out if he was interrupted, as was often the case, in the midst of one of these dictations. Though the subject of conversation might be quite different from that on which he was writing, the thread of thought of the latter was not broken and he would take up the matter again at the very phrase where he had stopped, it might be a half hour before, and go right on with it as if nothing had happened.

But Jaurès's flowery language, which sometimes bordered on mere verbosity, so involved his thought that it was often impossible to understand just what he meant, and I doubt if it would always have been easy for him to state exactly what was in his mind at the moment of writing certain enigmatic lines. In such cases, a whole paragraph of

words was often reduced, in the translation, to a few clear sentences, and even the severest critic would have admitted, I think, after examining the two manuscripts, that the English "arrangement in black and white," as Whistler would have said, was more acceptable than the Mallarmé obscurity of the French original.

In this respect Jean Jaurès exactly resembled Emilio Castelar, both great orators, it will be noted. But the famous Spaniard's thought was more easily grasped, for he dwelt generally on political and historical subjects, whereas the Frenchman's favorite themes were as a rule the philosophy of socialism, which by their very essence were apt to be elusive, and were hard to transfer from one language into another. So Castelar's contributions to the REVIEW also had to be considerably curtailed, simplified and edited before they appeared in these pages, as otherwise they would have surpassed in unintelligibility Henry James's "second manner."

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During the summer months of the closing year of the last century sat daily in the east wing of the Paris Foreign Office the most remarkable, at least as regards personnel, international arbitration court that was, perhaps, ever convened. I refer to the body which met to decide the Anglo-Venezuelan conflict. The tribunal consisted of five members. For Venezuela were the Chief Justice of the United States and Justice Brewer of the Supreme Court. For Great Britain were the Lord Chief Justice and Lord Justice of Appeals Collins, while the fifth member was M. de Martens, the distinguished Russian authority on international law, who, by the way, was a contributor to the REVIEW. The counsel for Venezuela was headed by ex-President Harrison, and for England by the future Lord Chief Justice, Lord Alverstone, then known as Sir Richard Webster, Attorney General. None of this brilliant group of lawyers is alive today. The official agent for Venezuela was the former Minister of Venezuela at Washington and later at Paris, Señor J. M. de Rojas, who was invited by this periodical to prepare an article on the proceedings. The article was written but never printed, for what reason I do not now recall. But the following incident I do most distinctly recall.

The evening that Señor de Rojas handed me his manuscript, he gave me this account of what happened behind the

scenes. The occurrence deserves to be recorded, as it does great credit to Chief Justice Fuller and to the United States, the then guardian of Venezuela's interests. "At the final sitting of the arbitrators, when the award was to be settled upon," said Señor de Rojas, "it was found that M. de Martens had been brought over almost wholly to the British point of view, so that the award, as originally intended, would have been a veritable disaster for Venezuela and, indirectly, for the United States too. Thereupon the Chief Justice, filled with anxiety and indignation, sprang from his seat and exclaimed in a most determined tone of voice: 'Gentlemen, such a one-sided award will throw back the cause of arbitration a century, and, which is more to the question before us, would be absolutely unjust to Venezuela. It is impossible for Justice Brewer and myself to accept such an award, and'—here the speaker raised his voice still higher—'such an award will never be accepted by the United States Senate, either; and what is more, I will see that it is not accepted!' This threat had the desired effect, and if my country came off with some honor, though far too little, I think, it is due to the determined and uncompromising stand of Chief Justice Fuller, well seconded by Justice Brewer." I do not know whether this anecdote had its place in the article, but it is highly probable that it did not, as all the parties therein mentioned were then alive.

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But a contribution rejected in one editorial sanctum is sometimes warmly welcomed in another. The excellent article by Honoré de Balzac, "Modern Government," which appeared in these pages in the number for December, 1900, is a good example of this fact. I found it among the manuscripts of that indefatigable and eccentric Belgian collector, the late Viscount Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, who told me it had been written for a periodical of Louis Philippe's time, but had not been accepted by the editor. So what was originally intended for a French audience appeared some seventy years later before an American one, and the honorarium of 1830, which, probably, would not have done more than settle the butcher's bill of the ever-bankrupt French novelist, was large enough in 1900 to pay the year's rent, taxes included, of the Belgian's flat in the Rue d'Alger, Paris.

I might go on and speak of my relations with such other Frenchmen as the late Senator Jean Macé, author of the once popular, even in English, book entitled, *The History of a Mouthful of Bread*," who wrote in the REVIEW on "Universal Suffrage in France"; of Georges Clemenceau, who contributed in 1897 two articles on the French navy; and of Camille Flammarion, who related in the number for January, 1890, how he became an astronomer; of Yves-Guyot and Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, the French free-traders, who have treated several economic problems in these pages; of Jules Roche, the French Deputy, who has discussed "The National Debt of France" and "Socialism and the State"; but I must stop here as I have already over-run my allotted space.

THEODORE STANTON.